

Welcome



Congressman Earl Blumenauer (OR-03)

I could not be more pleased with the interest in our Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act. The interest that people have demonstrated in dealing with the issue of sanitation and safe drinking water around the world has truly been gratifying and I am excited to use this technique, our e-town hall, so that people around the country can share their questions, their comments, and get information as legislation takes shape. This is one of the series of efforts of this nature that we've been pleased to pioneer here in the House of Representatives. It's exciting to think of an ability to instantaneously communicate with people anywhere in the world on this critical issue.

We will be dealing with a number of questions and comments that you have and we welcome not only your comments about the legislation but about ways that we can do a better job of engaging you to make a conference like this work better in the future. In the course of the next half-hour we're facing over a hundred children that will have lost their lives needlessly to waterborne disease. This legislation is an

opportunity for us to make sure that the federal government is doing all it can to remedy this terrible situation.

Thanks for joining us and I look forward to our online conversation.

[Click here to submit a question about the "Water for the Poor Act of 2005"](#)

Sincerely,

Earl Blumenauer

[CLICK HERE](#) To read the full text of the "Water for the Poor Act of 2005"

[CLICK HERE](#) For more information about the legislation

[Introduction \(*.MP3\)](#)

- [What exactly does this bill do? What will be the results? Who decides who gets this money? Who implements the program?](#)
- [How long would it take to see results? And how much would it cost?](#)
- [What countries will benefit most from this bill?](#)
- [What got you interested in this issue?](#)
- [Privatization of water management and/or delivery has effectively excluded the poor from equitable access to water. How does HR 1973 ensure affordability and equal access to water in the context of local economies? How does HR 1973 include popular participation to bring oversight and accountability to water projects?](#)
- [Who is Senator Paul Simon and why did you name the bill after him?](#)
- [Why should we be sending the money over there when we are so in debt with Katrina and such?](#)

- Your idea to make the funding of clean water and sanitation a main stay of our foreign policy is an outstanding one. Do you think that this administration will support this proposal and what can constituents do to facilitate the passage of your idea?
- With what standards will the strategy for improving water access be carried out? How can we ensure that this doesn't hurt the environment or turn into one of the failed water privatization efforts that we've seen before?
- What agency will do the actual work of setting up the infrastructure needed to provide clean water in the longterm? Will this infrastructure include sewage and water treatment plants as well?
- Wouldn't improving the education of developing nations be more important in the long term?
- I think this is an important issue and I'm glad to see your bill which will hopefully better align State Department actions with our commitments and goals. My question, however, is about what other countries are doing to help especially in light of our budget situation and the money we are spending after Katrina. It was a global commitment to provide the world with safe drinking water and sanitation, so what are the other countries doing to help?
- Do you consider this as part of an overall strategy to improve America's image abroad?
- How much of our investment would go into training local communities to maintain these critical infrastructures?
- There will be no water for the poor once the corporations are able to privatize its access and distribution. How can the people prevent this from happening here?
- Is Iraq included in the list of nations for this bill? If so, why isn't the money already appropriated for Iraq spending used instead?
- Does the act include any protection against agribusiness and other industry eliminating people's access to water by digging deeper wells that result in lowering the water table so much the wells of poor people cannot reach the water? Is there provision for testing water so that we don't encourage people to rely on water heavily tainted with arsenic, as we did in Bangladesh?
- How do we make sure that the resources we will be giving will actually reach the people for whom they are intended?
- To what extent will this legislation help minimize international conflicts over water?
- The summary of the Water for the Poor Act says that there is an additional \$3 billion needed from all donors. How much of this money are you proposing that the U.S. contribute? It also states that the lack of clean water costs the world economy \$380 billion annually. If the number of people without access to safe water is halved, will the relative costs be halved also. Will we actually "get a rebate on the money invested? Where will this money come from? Do we have the money to invest in foreign countries while we are rebuilding our own nation?
- Conclusion

What exactly does this bill do? What will be the results? Who decides who gets this money? Who implements the program?

The bill does 3 primary things: it raises the level of attention that water and sanitation get in our foreign policy and establishes a new and specific US government effort to deal increasing affordable and equitable access to water and sanitation services, it sets out policy to make that these investments as cost-effective and sustainable as possible, and requires the State Department to develop strategy with specific timetables, benchmarks, and funding levels to keep our promises made in Johannesburg at the UN summit in 2002.

The decisions on who gets the money is going to up to Congress, which funds the money, the State Department, which is in charge of developing our overall strategy, and the different agencies and departments of the Federal government like the United States Agency for International Development and the Environmental Protection Agency, which have programs to invest in water and sanitation. But an important part of this is to work with communities, civic groups, and foreign governments who are trustworthy partners to allow them to design and control projects that meet their needs and their capacity to take care of maintenance and upkeep so that we get the best value from our investments.

How long would it take to see results? And how much would it cost?

We can see results almost immediately. The solutions for many places without safe drinking water can be very simple, such as basins to catch rain water or pipes that use gravity to bring water to a village. Over the last 20 years, 2 billion new people have gotten access to clean water. While cost estimates vary, depending on technology, the best estimates I've seen show that it would cost less than the price of a takeout pizza per American per year.

What countries will benefit most from this bill?

Any country facing water and sanitation challenges can benefit from this bill, but I expect that the greatest impact will be in places with the greatest need, such as sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia. In 2003, the last year for which we have statistics, the United States Agency for International Development only invested approximately \$100 million dollars in water and sanitation, \$40 million of which in for Afghanistan, the West Bank & Gaza, and Jordan. Only \$8 million was invested in water for Africa, despite having the lowest percentage of people with access to safe drinking water of any region in the world. Our bill establishes a number of "high-priority countries" based on places with the greatest need and places where our investment can be expected to do the most good. It's also worth remembering that, even in countries that aren't all that poor, there are often people who still don't have the basic human needs for water and sanitation met.

What got you interested in this issue?

Water issues have always interested me. In Portland, I was Commissioner of Public Works and got to be involved first-hand in the challenge of clean water for cities in the U.S. But on an international level, the scope and immediacy of this crisis in water and sanitation around the world was really brought home to me when I attended the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002. It was there that the United States and 185 other countries pledged to cut in half the percentage of people without access to clean water and sanitation. I visited some of the hardest-off townships in South Africa, such as Soweto, and the need for water was at the forefront of people's needs.

Privatization of water management and/or delivery has effectively excluded the poor from equitable access to water. How does HR 1973 ensure affordability and equal access to water in the context of local economies? How does HR 1973 include popular participation to bring oversight and accountability to water projects?

Our goal is to provide resources, not to have a template that pushes poor communities towards private ownership. The concept is to strengthen civil society to be able to develop and manage their own water resources. This is an opportunity for the United States government to broaden both tools and participation. The intent is to work for the poorest of the world's citizens and to ensure that water access is both affordable and equitable.

Who is Senator Paul Simon and why did you name the bill after him?

Senator Paul Simon was a Democratic senator from Illinois from 1984 to 1997. His book, Tapped Out: The Coming World Water Crisis and What We Can Do About It, made him a pioneer at dealing with international water issues in Congress. I treasure the last meeting I once had with him and the copy of his book that he gave me. (Incidentally, he was also a pioneer in the world of bow-ties for Members of Congress.) Senator Simon passed away in 1993 and I felt, as did Congressman Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), Chairman of the House International Relations Committee, that naming this bill in his honor would be a fitting tribute to his many years of service.

Why should we be sending the money over there when we are so in debt with Katrina and such?

This is a good investment, good for our country, and the right thing to do. Every dollar we invest in clean water and sanitation creates between \$3 and \$34 in economic productivity. Helping to grow economies around the world increases markets for Americans products. Helping people in need also creates a more stable world and improves people's perception of the United States. But most importantly, when there are people in need and people struggling to improve the health of their communities, Americans have always been willing to do the right thing and help up.

Your idea to make the funding of clean water and sanitation a main stay of our foreign policy is an outstanding one. Do you think that this administration will support this proposal and what can constituents do to facilitate the passage of your idea?

I am pleased that the proposal enjoyed broad bipartisan support in Congress and, according to the administration, consistent with their goals and objectives. I was in Johannesburg with administration representatives when they were part of the global agreement to cut in half the number of people without access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation. I am pleased with the response and assistance we've received from the administration on the proposal.

Just because it has enjoyed this support does not mean that we should take passage for granted. To the contrary, these are difficult political times and there are many competing pressures that use up the legislative "oxygen". There is a critical role to be played by religious organizations, humanitarian and environmental groups, to be cut through the political clutter, to help focus attention on this critical issue that has been too-long neglected. Promoting local discussions in churches, synagogues, mosques, college campuses will help create interest and energy. Every elected official could be questioned by their constituents which will raise the profile, in a positive way. Few are opposed, many have not yet focused on it yet. This also cries out for letters to the editor and local opinion pieces and calls to talk shows. All of the traditional tools will create the traction necessary to help move the bill along and then, ultimately, see that it is properly implemented.

With what standards will the strategy for improving water access be carried out? How can we ensure that this doesn't hurt the environment or turn into one of the failed water privatization efforts that we've seen before?

The Water for the Poor Act was developed after months of consultation with development and humanitarian groups, environmental organizations, Members of Congress from both parties, water-related businesses, and our professional diplomats so I think we were able to create standards and policies that make everyone happy. The idea is to provide the government with better tools to address the issues of water and sanitation and then set guidelines for how to use those tools. Some of those guidelines include ensuring that access to water is affordable and equitable for the very poor, that we work with trusted local partners to design programs that work for their needs, we support countries to find ways to develop their own resources to address these issues, and that they protect the environment. After all, if we destroy the natural resources where water comes from, all the pipes in the world won't do much good.

What agency will do the actual work of setting up the infrastructure needed to provide clean water in the longterm? Will this infrastructure include sewage and water treatment plants as well?

The legislation calls for a strategy that the State Department will develop, and the primary implementer is the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Since there are programs that deal with safe water and sanitation across the federal government - EPA, Department of Commerce, Center for Disease Control and so on - this legislation is critical to harness the resources and direct the energy efficiently.

The actual configuration of the specific projects would depend on the situation. In many rural areas, much more basic efforts at rudimentary sanitation and well location would provide the desired results without major infrastructure. The goal is to get maximum benefit for most people as quickly as possible. This probably is a bias towards the low-tech, low-cost, high-impact solutions, however there are financing mechanisms that will help countries with more significant problems that require more sophisticated infrastructure, like sewers and treatment plants. The goal is flexibility and cost-effectiveness.

Wouldn't improving the education of developing nations be more important in the long term?

Improving education is critical and this bill is one tool to do that. In many poor communities, children – girls, especially – are unable to go to school because they have to walk for hours each day to bring back water for their family. In fact, water and sanitation are key components in every development sector: education, health, economic growth, good governance, and so forth.

Congressional Facts and Findings

FACT

Water-related diseases are a human tragedy, killing up to 5 million people annually, preventing millions of people from leading healthy lives, and undermining development efforts.

FACT

A child dies an average of every 15 seconds because of lack of access to safe water and adequate sanitation.

FACT

In the poorest countries in the world, one out of five children dies from a preventable, water-related disease.

FACT

Lack of access to safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygiene practices are directly responsible for the vast majority of diarrheal diseases which kill over 2 million children each year.

FACT

At any given time, half of all people in the developing world are suffering from one or more of the main diseases associated with inadequate provision of water supply and sanitation services.

FACT

Over 1.2 billion people, one in every four people in the developing world, lack access to safe drinking water.

FACT

Over 2.4 billion people, two in every five people in the developing world,

I think this is an important issue and I'm glad to see your bill which will hopefully better align State Department actions with our commitments and goals. My question, however, is about what other countries are doing to help especially in light of our budget situation and the money we are spending after Katrina. It was a global commitment to provide the world with safe drinking water and sanitation, so what are the other countries doing to help?

Right now, other donor countries are doing much more than the U.S. Of course, the people who are doing the most and working the hardest are the communities and people in need of water, themselves. Often times, the poor end up paying much more for water – often dirty, unsafe water – than those of us who have access to modern water systems do. If we can make an initial investment, we can help poor people in Africa, Asia and around the world free up the resources to deal with their own needs and help develop their own economies and societies.

Do you consider this as part of an overall strategy to improve America's image abroad?

Absolutely. I think that American generosity is one of the best things we have going for us in terms of showing the true heart of the American people. After all, most Americans think that we give 5 times more development assistance than we do – and they support that.

But I worry when, around the world, so many people's experience of America are things that bother them or worse - images of American troops in Iraq, the abuses at Abu Ghraib, American culture taking over where local culture used to thrive – and I think that seeing America helping people with their basic needs can provide that opening to show a different face.

How much of our investment would go into training local communities to maintain these critical infrastructures?

There is a balance that we're trying to strike – and its going to take some experimenting – between providing actual resources and infrastructure for people who just don't have the money to build these things for themselves, and training local officials and water managers to create policies that make themselves more self sufficient. And we include a specific provision in the law to support State Department programs that do that kind of training. What we try to do in to ensure that local communities are part of this process from the beginning and they can help design projects that meet their capacity to find replacement parts and maintain the water delivery systems themselves.

There will be no water for the poor once the corporations are able to privatize its access and distribution. How can the people prevent this from happening here?

The push towards water privatization isn't just controversial, but it's actually encountering resistance in developing countries. By channeling the resources here to the lowest level and providing mechanisms for people to help establish low-cost effective measures it avoids this dilemma. The areas that we're most concerned about are not particularly profitable for an international corporation.

Because this legislation is directed towards engaging the community in designing its own solution, it avoids the specter of a "hostile takeover" of this vital resource.

It should, however, be noted that in some of the more urbanized areas, there will be the need for consumers to pay for the water. We provide resources to make this financial burden less onerous but the fact is while water may be free, finding it, purifying it, and transporting it cost money. The good news is that since many poor people now are paying exorbitant costs for their water in time or money, modest cost for a well-designed system will actually be cheaper for most.

Is Iraq included in the list of nations for this bill? If so, why isn't the money already appropriated for Iraq spending used instead?

This bill doesn't include or exclude specific countries – it's about creating a strategy for the whole globe. But at the same time, it focuses on countries that don't have the resources or aren't getting the help they need. Iraq – as you can imagine – already has a rather large program to rebuild its water and sanitation infrastructure. The water and sanitation problems in Iraq aren't about lack of funding. But I think we should be able to make that same kind of effort, money-wise, in the countries that truly need it.

lack access to basic sanitation services.

FACT

Nearly 500 million people are affected by water stress or serious water scarcity. Under current trends, two-thirds of the world's population may be subject to moderate to high water stress by 2025.

FACT

Access to safe water and sanitation and improved hygiene are significant factors in controlling the spread of disease in the developing world and positively affecting worker productivity and economic development.

FACT

Increasing access to safe water and sanitation advances efforts toward other development objectives, such as fighting poverty and hunger, promoting primary education and gender equality, reducing child mortality, promoting environmental stability, improving the lives of slum dwellers, and strengthening national security.

FACT

Providing safe supplies of water and sanitation and hygiene improvements would save millions of lives by reducing the prevalence of water-borne diseases, water-based diseases, water-privation diseases, and water-related vector diseases.

FACT

Because women and girls in developing countries are often the carriers of water, lack of access to safe water and sanitation disproportionately affects women and limits women's opportunities at education, livelihood, and financial independence.

FACT

Every \$1 invested in safe water and sanitation would yield an economic

Does the act include any protection against agribusiness and other industry eliminating people's access to water by digging deeper wells that result in lowering the water table so much the wells of poor people cannot reach the water? Is there provision for testing water so that we don't encourage people to rely on water heavily tainted with arsenic, as we did in Bangladesh?

It is envisioned that resources would be available for appropriate water quality monitoring and environmental protection - this is fundamental to providing safe drinking water so that we can avoid a tragedy like happened in Bangladesh.

The whole concept of the bill is to focus on those most in need and to produce water in a sustainable fashion. We have no interest in creating a competition for the water that results in short-changing poor villagers. Indeed, by having provisions in the bill that encourage integrated water resource management, dealing with all the stakeholders, this situation will be less likely than it is today. The goal is to have comprehensive, sustainable water management techniques and principles both understood and practices.

How do we make sure that the resources we will be giving will actually reach the people for whom they are intended?

Water and sanitation assistance is very hard to divert to some Swiss bank account. We can work in partnership with nongovernmental organization, local communities, and trusted governments to make sure the assistance ends up where it should. I included a specific provision in this bill to create a program to monitor the aid. After all, every dollar lost to corruption is a dollar that's not going to help people in need.

To what extent will this legislation help minimize international conflicts over water?

Surprisingly, the history of international conflicts that were instigated as a result of water supply shortages are relatively few. That may not be the case in the future, as demands for water escalate and individual countries like Turkey or China have the ability to dramatically affect the supplies for their downstream neighbors.

One of the advantages of the approach envisioned in this legislation is the promotion of cooperative efforts at water management. Dealing with entire watersheds in a comprehensive fashion may well become an instrument where principles of international cooperation may be easier to see than they are in other arenas.

The summary of the Water for the Poor Act says that there is and additional \$3 billion needed from all donors. How much of this money are you proposing that the U.S. contribute? It also states that the lack of clean water costs the world economy \$380 billion annually. If the number of people without access to safe water is halved, will the relative costs be halved also. Will we actually "get a rebate on the money invested? Where will this money come from? Do we have the money to invest in foreign countries while we are rebuilding our own nation?

The United States can and should invest far more in helping reach our commitment for safe drinking water and sanitation. At a time when we are spending hundreds of billions of dollars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the struggle against global terror, an investment of an additional billion dollars or more would pay enormous dividends. The potential is not just good will for the United States or a reduction in human disease and suffering, which would be worthy enough on its own merit, it also represents a dramatic increase in global security and stability that most Americans can appreciate. There's also an economic benefit as other countries become stable and more prosperous, there are markets for United States goods and services. Indeed, there are opportunities for American experts and companies to help develop the infrastructure and technologies, whether they are private businesses or non-profit entities.

There will be a "rebate" by new markets and opportunities for Americans, reducing our costs of global security, and it will encourage other developed countries to follow our lead and share in the costs.

The question is not whether we have the money to invest in foreign countries while rebuilding our own, I think the average American family can invest the price of a latte or two per year to reach this goal. I don't think we can afford not to.

return of between \$3 and \$34, depending on the region.

FACT

The annual level of investment needed to meet the water and sanitation needs of developing countries far exceeds the amount of Official Development Assistance and spending by governments of developing countries, so facilitating and attracting greater public and private investment is essential.

FACT

Target 10 of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals is to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015.

FACT

The participants in the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, including the United States, agreed to the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development which included an agreement to work to reduce by one-half 'the proportion of people who are unable to reach or afford safe drinking water,' and 'the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation' by 2015.

FACT

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the United States announced the Water for the Poor Initiative, committing \$970 million for fiscal years 2003 through 2005 to improve sustainable management of fresh water resources and accelerate and expand international efforts to achieve the goal of cutting in half by 2015 the proportion of people who are unable to reach

Conclusion



Thank you so very much for joining us for this online conversation about the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act I hope that we've been able to cover the range of issues that are of concern to you. I certainly felt that the questions we received reflected the questions that we have been struggling with in trying to craft legislation that can meet the tests here in Congress and of the American public, as well as meeting the needs of people around the world who desperately need access to pure water and safe sanitary practices.

We encourage you to review this material and continue to share with us your thoughts, additional questions, and recommendations to

improve the legislation. We anticipate that it will be coming to the floor of the House we hope within the month any additional thoughts you have that can help us refine the proposal to make it more effective and more acceptable would be deeply appreciated.

We look forward to continuing conversations with you on this and other vital issues. Thank you for much.

 [Conclusion \(*.mp3\)](#)

or to afford safe drinking water.

FACT

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 58/217 February 9, 2004) proclaimed 'the period from 2005 to 2015 the International Decade for Action, 'Water for Life', to commence on World Water Day, 22 March 2005' for the purpose of increasing the focus of the international community on water-related issues at all levels and on the implementation of water-related programs and projects.

For more information about this legislation,

[CLICK HERE](#)